
Face Value: A Key Aspect of the Realist Aesthetic in the Novels of Pérez Galdós

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Literary critics are in general agreement that one of the most important aspects of Galdós's artistry is his ability to create interesting and memorable characters. Life-giver to more than 8,000 *personajes*, Galdós often made facial descriptions the creative focus of his characterization. One source of such descriptions was external, everyday reality. For example, we know from an eyewitness observer that in the upper balconies of the Madrid's *Teatro Real*, it was a common practice to designate "con nombres propios o con mote los palcos y las personas que los ocupaban." One of the best-known of these nicknames was "La pecera," for "aquel [palco] en que toda su familia, por un rasgo fisonómico determinado, daba cierta semejanza a su cara con la de los peces" (Cortezo 151).¹ Galdós makes use of this everyday phenomenon to create an astonishing array of literary "faces."

By the time Galdós began to write *Miau* (1888), he had already created a whole family with the surname Pez, commencing their fictional life in *La desheredada* and continuing it in *El amigo Manso*, *Tormento*, *La de Bringas*, and *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Galdós mentions that this family has a theater box at the *Real* (*La desheredada* (1036; vol.1, ch.12, sec.3) and, in another context, playfully employs the term "pecera."² Having thus created characters with human-fish analogies³ and utilized their nickname during his abomination of opportunistic politicians (who can swim in any water), Galdós now needed a different animal-based nickname and different physical characteristics as well for the family of theatergoers he wished to create for his new novel. This was especially true because he desired now in *Miau* to focus upon one of the major victims of the political system, the "cesante" and his family. Using the surname Villaamil (evocative of a thousand such in the *Villa Real de Madrid*), Galdós's felicitously decided to give a feline appearance to members of this family. Madrileños have traditionally been known as "gatos," and certainly Galdós was quite aware of this fact, for in his presentation of a minor character (Argüelles), he designates him as "pequeño, genuino *gato* de Madrid, rostro enjuto y color de cera, bigote y perilla teñidos de negro, melenas largas y bien atusadas" (611; ch.21).

While the description of the female members of the Villaamil family comes from the way they look when seated together in the theater (III, 559), the case of the non-theater-attending father is different. He reflects the fact that Spain was a colonial power and that malaria and yellow fever had ruined the health of some of its citizens serving abroad. First presented as a very minor character in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Ramón Villaamil bears the nickname "*Ramses II*," and his yellow, mummy-like appearance ("con ojos de espectro . . . [y] voz de ultratumba" serves as a source of humor when he approaches the café table of a group of spiritualists, seemingly as "uno de aquellos seres muertos, hace miles de años, que vienen ahora por estos barrios, llamados por el toque de la pata de un velador" (35-36; vol.3, ch.1, sec.5).

Subsequently, in order to convert Villaamil from a very minor character into a viable protagonist for his next novel, Galdós found it advantageous to develop further Ramón's physical description and also to change his nickname. Galdós had stated in *Fortunata y Jacinta* that "El clima de Cuba y Filipinas le había dejado en los huesos, y como era todo él una pura mojama, relumbraban en su cara las miradas de tal modo, que parecía que se iba a comer a la gente" (35; vol.3, ch.1, sec.5). Using Villaamil's tropical experience as a point of departure, Galdós easily converts Villamil into a tiger-like character in *Miau*. After tropical fevers had damaged Villaamil's liver and caused his jaundiced complexion, the death of his beloved daughter Luisa, we now learn, added the final touches:

[S]in ruidoso duelo exterior, mudo y con los ojos secos, se desquició y desplomó interiormente, quedándose como ruina lamentable, sin esperanza, sin ilusión ninguna de la vida, y desde entonces se le secó el cuerpo hasta momificarse, y fue tomando su cara aquel aspecto de ferocidad famélica que le asemejaba a un tigre anciano e inútil." (590; ch.13)

The "face value" of the feline designations for all the adult members of the Villaamil family is not only that they reflect certain realities of nineteenth-century Madrid and give rise to the novel's title. They also help achieve a central psychological realism through the reactions of each member of the family, as they learn that the sobriquet "*Miau*" has been applied to them. Sometimes these reactions are mainly a source of entertaining humor (Chamberlin "Social Darwinism" 300), but the father's ("el señor *Miau*"), ever-changing reac-

tions to the "apodo" are, more seriously, a marker along a path of mental deterioration leading to suicide.⁴ The controlling initial physical description of Villaamil as "tigre viejo y tísico," "tigre inválido," and "tigre caduco" (554, 555; ch.1) is also operative throughout the novel as Galdós presents his "cesante" as the only handicapped animal among all the animal-like characters who are competing in the social darwinistic fauna of Restoration Madrid.

In addition to what he saw about him, Galdós occasionally uses portraits of famous people as a point of departure for character presentation. For example, concerning the character Plácido Estupiñá in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, Galdós' narrator says, "Los que quieren conocer su rostro, miren el de Rosini, ya viejo, como nos le han transmitido las estampas y fotografías del gran músico" (177; vol.1, ch.3. sec.3). Similarly, concerning Mauricia la Dura, who appears in Parts Two and Three of the same novel, one reads:

[S]u rostro era conocido de todo el que entendiese algo de iconografía histórica, pues era el mismo, exactamente el mismo, de Napoleón Bonaparte antes de ser Primer Cónsul. Aquella mujer singularísima, bella y varonil, tenía el pelo corto y lo llevaba siempre mal peinado y peor sujeto. Cuando se agitaba mucho trabajando, las melenas se le soltaban, llegándole hasta los hombros, y entonces la semejanza con el precoz caudillo de Italia y Egipto era perfecta [. . .]. Ejercían indecible fascinación sobre el observador aquellas cejas rectas y prominentes, los ojos grandes y febriles, escondidos como en acecho bajo con concavidad frontal, la pupila inquieta y ávida, mucho hueso en los pómulos, poca carne en las mejillas, la quijada robusta, la nariz romana, la boca acentuada, terminando en flexiones enérgicas, y la expresión, en fin, soñadora y melancólica. Su voz era bronca, más de hombre que de mujer, y su lenguaje, vulgarismo, revelando una naturaleza desordenada, con alternativas misteriosas de depravación y de afabilidad. (607-08; vol.2, ch.6, sec.1)

Galdós reinforces this image of a "mujer napoleónica" (618; vol.2, ch. 5, sec.3) during Mauricia's several appearances in the novel by

calling attention to her "faz napoleónica" (615; vol.2, ch.6, sec.3), to the fact that she is "más napoleónica que nunca" (641; vol.3, ch.6, sec.11), and finally to her appearance as "el retrato vivo de Bonaparte" (235; vol.3, ch.6, sec.9). Like the French emperor, Mauricia is militant and aggressive. In her very first appearance, she tells in detail how she attacked two other women (608; vol.2, ch.6, sec. 2), and later in the novel she relates a similar incident (197; vol.3, ch.6, sec.4). Her uncontrollable need for fighting becomes the climax of Chapter six, Part Two, as she attacks the nuns of the Micaelas Convent with stones. In this battle (which is described with both military imagery and allusions to the French emperor) Mauricia's forte—like Napoleon's—is long-range projectiles. And when she is finally expelled from the convent, the street cleaners, "con las carretillas por delante y las escobas sobre ellas siguieron detrás de Mauricia, como una escolta de burlesca artillería, haciendo un ruido de mil demonios y disparándole bala de rasa de groserías e injurias" (656; vol.2, ch.6, sec.10). Like Napoleon, Mauricia prefers brandy (649; vol.2, ch.6, sec.10 and *passim*), she is even captured by Protestants (165; vol.3, ch.5, sec.3.), and as she lies dying the reader is treated to the good fun of seeing a musician first attempt to play and then succeed in playing the Spanish national anthem (185; vol.3, ch.6, sec.2; and 205; sec.5).⁵

Thus, once again, initial facial portraiture is important in establishing a narrator-reader bond of understanding and shared emotion in regard to the character. In the case of "la Dura," this understanding evokes a pleasant response as the (patriotic Spanish) reader recognizes, and enjoys seeing parodied, various facets of a national enemy's life before this evil doer is "killed off" by the author.

Francisco de Bringas, who first appears in *Tormento* and then more prominently in *La de Bringas*, looks exactly like Louis Adolphe Thiers, historian, economist, and former president of the French Republic. Because Thiers's picture had appeared repeatedly in Spanish newspapers and magazines,⁶ Galdós needs only to say, "Una coincidencia feliz nos exime de hacer un retrato, pues bastan dos palabras para que todos los que esto lean se le figuren y puedan verle vivo, palpable y luminoso cual si le tuvieran delante." Then, after describing the Frenchman's facial shape, forehead, hair, nose, and eyes, Galdós signals the reader how he wishes his own creation to be "read." He specifies, "No faltaba en Bringas más que el mirar profundo y todo lo que es de la peculiar fisonomía del espíritu; faltábale lo que distingue al hombre superior, que sabe hacer la historia y escribirla, del hombre común que ha nacido para componer una cerradura y clavar una alfombra" (1460-61; ch.2). Throughout *La*

de Bringas Galdós steadfastly exploits the great ironical distance between his character and the French prototype (as John Varey has so well demonstrated [63-69]).

In the case of Benina, the protagonist of *Misericordia*, Galdós again assumes that the mention of the prototypal referent will strike a responsive chord and, consequently, will require very little description on his part. Thus, after mentioning his character's pleasant facial features, which initially seem primarily designed to differentiate Benina from the other beggars, Galdós concludes:

[P]arecía una Santa Rita de Casia que andaba por el mundo en penitencia. Faltábale sólo el crucifijo y la llaga en la frente, si bien podría creerse que hacía las veces de ésta el lobanillo del tamaño de un garbanzo, redondo, cárdeno, situado como a media pulgada más arriba del entrecejo. (1882; ch.3)

The very ugly "lobanillo," as John Kronik has elucidated (21-23), functions artistically as a metaphor within a metonymy in the process of communicating to the reader the true saintliness of Benina, which we are to accept by the end of the novel. The revelations in chapter 29 that the protagonist's name actually is "*Benina de Casia*" and that "algunos guasones de su pueblo se burlaban de ella diciendo que *venía de Santa Rita*" (1956; ch.29) also support this viewpoint. Subsequently, Benina's charitable obligations become almost overwhelming, but she continues "con tantas cruces a cuesta por la empinada senda [. . .]." (1959; ch.30). In the very last words of the novel, she even speaks the words of Christ himself.⁷

At times details of well-known paintings may be modified as Galdós creates his own character portraits. For example, in the case of Manuel José Ramón de Pez, Galdós (in *La de Bringas*) evokes Murillo's painting of San José: "Si Pez no se afeitara el mentón y en vez de levita llevara túnica y vara, sería la imagen viva del santo Patriarca, tal como nos le han transmitido los pintores" (1593; ch.12). Such a countenance is not only perfect for allaying suspicions as the self-enriching politician exploits his compatriots, but it also allows Galdós to express social criticism. Don Benito says concerning Pez:

Su carácter salía sin estorbo a su cara [. . .].
Aquellos ojos decían a todo el que los miraba.
"Soy la expresión de esa España dormida,
beatífica, que se goza de ser juguete de los

sucesos [. . .] que se somete a todo el que la quiere mandar, venga de donde viniera . . . que no entiende de ideas, ni de accion, ni de nada que no sea soñar y digerir". (1593; ch.12)

At other times even a detailed description of a painting may not hold the key to a *personaje's* true character. Such is the case of Doña Lupe ("la de los pavos") in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, where the key is promptly displaced to another part of the body. Thus Doña Lupe is made memorable not because of her facial description⁸ but because of her bosom. After a full description of her countenance, which Galdós concludes is "semejante a las pinturas de la Edad Media" (532; vol.2, ch.3, sec.3), he goes on to reveal that "Había en ella dos personas distintas: la mujer y la prestamista [. . .]. La doble personalidad de esta señora tenía un signo externo." This external sign is her bosom, with one breast being genuine and the other (as the result of a mastectomy) false:

[S]ólo la mitad de su seno era de carne: la otra mitad era insensible y bien se le podía clavar un puñal sin que doliese. Lo mismo era su corazón: la mitad de carne, la mitad de algodón. La índole de las relaciones que con las personas tuviese determinaba el predominio de tal o cual mitad. No mediando ningún pagaré, daba gusto tratar con aquella señora . . . Doña Lupe adquirió gradual y rápidamente todas las cualidades de un perfecto usurero, y echó el medio pecho de algodón, haciéndose insensible, implacable y dura cuando de la cobranza puntual de sus créditos se trataba. (539-40; vol.2, ch.3. sec.5)

Face value was so important to Galdós that it could undergo a complete transformation as he worked from a preliminary manuscript to his final version. An example in point concerns Nicolás Rubin, the celibate cleric in *Fortunata y Jacinta* who counsels Fortunata into an impossible marriage (with his own impotent brother). In the Alpha MS Galdós seems to hint at a priestly lack of testosterone with the observation that "apenas necesitaba afeitarse para tener la cara sin pelos." (f 542).⁹ However, in the final printed version Galdós finds an alternate method to communicate lack of libidinal desire¹⁰ and thus changes completely his treatment of facial hair. The narrator now asserts:

Su fisonomía no era agradable, distinguiéndose por lo peluda [. . .]. Se afeitaba hoy, y mañana tenía toda la cara negra. Recién afeitado, sus mandíbulas eran de color de pizarra. El vello le crecía en las manos y brazos como la hierba en fértil campo, y por las orejas y narices le asomaban espesos mechones. Diríase que eran las ideas, que, cansadas de la oscuridad del cerebro se asomaban por los balcones de la nariz y de las orejas a ver lo que pasaba en el mundo. (552; vol.2, ch.4, sec.2)

It is, of course, the ideas of Father Rubin ("el cual entendía tanto de amor como de herrar mosquitos" [633; vol.2, ch.6, sec.7] that cause so much damage to the individual and society (565; vol.2, ch.4, sec.5). That Galdós felt very strongly about this matter is attested in many ways,¹¹ including his addition to Nicolás's description—with a touch of contemporary realism—of the nose, mouth, and forehead of a well-known criminal (Boo 144).

Galdós was interested as well in physiognomy, a pseudoscience that held that anyone could learn to read the essence, as well as many details, of individual human character by means of a system of countenance signs. Although such an idea had existed since ancient times, its most famous advocate was the late eighteenth-century Swiss divine Johann Caspar Lavater (Rivers 66-103; Tytler 35-81). Most of the major nineteenth-century novelists, including Dickens, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, and Alas, were aware of Lavater's theories, which circulated throughout Europe in richly illustrated volumes. These novelists were equally acquainted with the concurrent theory of phrenology, developed by the Viennese physician Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828), which held that each of the functions of the mind had its own place in the brain and that a person's mental and moral characteristics could be determined by examining the shape, as well as any protuberances, of the cranium (Colbert 1-38).¹²

Although Galdós did not own the works of Lavater and Gall, we may be sure from textual evidence that he knew their theories. For example, in *Miau* the handsomeness of Víctor Cadalso comes in large part from the "equilibrio de piezas craneanas y de la perfecta armonía de línea" (579; ch.10), a description indebted to Gall's theories. Moreover, Martha Krow-Lucal has demonstrated that in the Alpha MS of *La desheredada*, Galdós created Manuel José Ramón Pez with a cranial protuberance (to indicate generosity), but then in his final version eliminated it for very good novelistic reasons (11-12). Evidence

of Lavater's theories may be found in Galdós' articles concerning Mesonero Romanos, Hartzenbusch, and others (Shoemaker *La crítica* 94-95); in one of his letters to *La Prensa* of Buenos Aires concerning the Fuencarral Street murder case (*Cronicón* 125-26); and, of course, throughout his novels. For example, in a sentence typical also of Balzac and Alas, Galdós' narrator in *Fortunata y Jacinta* says about Francisco Torquemada: "La fisonomía de aquel señor era difícil de entender. Sólo doña Lupe en virtud de larga práctica sabía encontrar algunos jeroglíficos en aquella cara ordinaria y enjuta [. . .]" (523; vol.2, ch.3, sec.5). Galdós also says that Torquemada's wife had a strong influence on Doña Lupe, "imprimiendo en ésta algunos rasgos de su fisonomía moral" (542; vol.2, ch.3, sec.5). The latter term was also a part of Lavater's system (VI, 1-72).

Lavater had illustrated his writings with more than six hundred engravings, including many with human faces resembling a variety of animals.¹³ Galdós' use of characters with animal-like features is well-known and is in evidence already in his first novel, *La Fontana de Oro*. Here the villain, Elías Orejón, in a manner that is similar to some of Lavater's sketches, is presented with a nose *enteramente igual al pico de un ave de rapiña* [. . .]. [S]u mirada era como la mirada de los pájaros nocturnos, intensa, luminosa, y más siniestra por el contraste oscuro de sus grandes cejas, por la elasticidad y sutileza de sus párpados sombríos, que en la oscuridad se dilataban mostrando dos pupilas muy claras. Estas, además de ver mucho, parecían que iluminaban lo que veían [...]. [Finalmente había] una serie de círculos concéntricos alrededor de los ojos, que remataban en semejanza con un lechuzo. (21; ch.20)¹⁴

Nearly 20 years later, when giving the Buenos Aires readers of *La Prensa* a very detailed facial description of Higinia Balaguer (who was convicted of murder in the well-known Calle de Fuencarral case), Galdós still found comparisons to the eyes of a bird of prey useful. The final words of his description were: "[L]os ojos hundidos, negros, vivísimos cuando observa atenta, dormilones cuando está distraída, tienen algo del mirar del ave de rapiña" (*Cronicón* 125-26).

An earlier series of articles has already demonstrated how prevalent human-animal comparisons were in various phases of Galdós' novelistic career.¹⁵ So let it suffice that with the advent of naturalism and social darwinism this phenomenon intensified.¹⁶ In the present study, we have already noted Villaamil's resemblance to a "tigre viejo y tísico" in *Miau* (554; ch.1). Among the many other animal-like characters in the same novel, Mendizábal, whose conservative political and religious ideas Galdós wished to discredit, stands out. (Chamberlin "Social Darwinism" [300-05]). The narrator affirms

that Mendizábal, “el hombre *gorila*, [. . .] aquel tipo de transición zoológica, en cuyo cráneo parecían verse demostradas las audaces hipótesis de Darwin [. . .], con su fealdad [era] digna de la vitrina de cualquier museo antropológico” (587; ch.12). Galdós may well have seen such specimen, for his friend Dr. Angel Pulido and other Krausistas were founders and supporters of anthropological museums. (Certainly, however, the gorilla is not one of the animals depicted in Lavater’s pre-Darwinistic volumes). Concerning Mendizábal, Galdós’ narrator says:

[A]quel hombre feísimo, de semblante extraño, por tener los ojos tan poco separados que parecían juntarse y ser uno cuando fijamente miraba. La nariz le salía de la frente, y después bajaba chafada y recta, esparrancando sus dos ventanillas en el nacimiento del labio superior, dilatado, tirante y tan extenso en todas direcciones, que ocupaba casi la mitad del rostro. La boca era larga, terminada en dos arrugas que dividían la barba en tres compartimientos flácidos, de pelambre ralo y gris: la frente estrecha; las manos, enormes y velludas; el cogote, recio; el cuerpo, corto, inclinado hacia adelante como resabio de una raza que hasta hace poco ha andado a cuatro pies. (578; ch..9)

Clearly here, as with Father Rubín in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, any positive emotional bonding of the reader with the character is definitely blocked, thus reducing to an absolute minimum the possibility that the reader could consider seriously the character’s ideas.

When, however, ideological considerations are not a priority, Galdós may simply entertain his reader with an animalistic facial description. In the case of Urbanito Cucúrbitas (in *Miau*), the incongruous combination of a botanical surname and an animalistic description allows a little comic relief at this juncture. Thus Cucúrbitas is presented as “pollancón rubio, ralo de pelo, estirado, zancudo y con mucho nuez; semejante a vástago precoz de la raza gallinácea que llaman Cochinchina” (661; ch.37). Another example of visual humor based on facial description occurs in *Misericordia* when Galdós, in a way similar to many other nineteenth-century writers shows his reservations about the pseudoscience of physiognomy—and some of the human-animal similarities it presented. After very realistic, de-

tailed descriptions of the facial characteristics of two women beggars in *Misericordia*, the narrator summarizes with two unscientific, reader-engaging descriptions:

Si vale comparar rostros de personas con rostros de animales, y si para conocer a la *Burlada* podríamos imaginarla como un gato que hubiera perdido el pelo en una riña, seguida de un chapuzón, digamos que era la Casiana como un caballo viejo, y perfecta su semejanza con los de la plaza de toros, cuando se tapaba con venda oblicua uno de los ojos, quedándose con el otro libre para el fisgoneo y vigilancia de sus cofrades.

(1881; ch.2)¹⁷

Galdós, like Zola and Alas, was also interested in the question of priestly celibacy and the problems a cleric might have in renouncing sexual pleasures, using facial descriptions to make his points. However, Galdós' initial portraiture of Father Pedro Polo in *El doctor Centeno* is completely different from that of Leopoldo Alas's cleric, Fermín de Pas, in *La Regenta*. Holding a view quite different from Alas's concerning how the realist author should treat the all-important matter of sex,¹⁸ Galdós says concerning Polo:

Bien afeitada la barba, los cañones negros sobre la cárdena piel, cruelmente tundida por la navaja, dábanle aspectos de figura de bronce [. . .]. Bastaba mirarle una vez para ver cómo a la superficie de aquella constitución sanguina salía la conciencia fisiológica, el yo animal. (1304; vol.1, ch.3)¹⁹

When Alas subsequently wrote a review of *Tormento*, he revealed considerable interest in Galdós' Father Polo, whom he calls "el clérigo fiera" (131). However, when Alas creates Fermín de Pas the following year in *La Regenta*, he forgoes a Galdosian generalized animality in favor of erotically specific semiotics with a seemingly playful disclaimer. Like many a strongly erotic character in world literature, Fermín has "ojos . . . verdes," and in his case they can give off "un resplendor punzante, que era una sorpresa desagradable, como una aguja en almohada de plumas." The priest also has a phallic nose, which is

larga, recta, sin corrección ni dignidad, también era sobrada de carne hacia el extremo y se inclinaba como árbol bajo el peso de excesivo fruto. Aquella nariz era la obra muerta en aquel rostro todo expresión, aunque escrito en griego, porque no era fácil leer y traducir lo que el Magistral sentía y pensaba. (150; vol.1, ch.1)²⁰

Another green-eyed character is Galdós' Mauro Requejo, whose portraiture is given in *El 19 de mayo y el 3 de mayo*. Knowing that physiognomists emphasized balanced proportionality and harmonic integration of all facial features to indicate positive qualities, Galdós chooses the opposite signifiers in his character delineation of the morally repugnant Requejo: "La cara de don Mauro Requejo era redonda como una muestra de reloj; no estaba en su sitio la nariz que se inclinaba de un hemisferio buscando el siniestro carillo, que, por obra y gracia de cierto lobanillo, era más voluminoso que su compañero (383; ch.3). To be sure that the reader perceives his intended message, Galdós immediately adds (and interprets) personalized negative details concerning eyes, lips, teeth, laughter, and smile.

Most nineteenth-century writers, including Galdós, acknowledged the popularity of physiognomy and indeed utilized some aspects of it when it suited their purposes, but they could not accept it as a valid science. Thus it is understandable that Don Benito sometimes guides his reader beyond standard physiognomical interpretations to a different evaluation of character traits. For example, among the nightly café "tertulianos" in Part Three of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, one meets a habitué who shamelessly exploits his own "fisonomía engañosa." Somewhat resembling the Italian statesman Cavour,²¹ Don Basilio Andrés de la Caña has a "nariz pequeña [. . .] y prismática [que] podía pasar por signo o emblema de agudeza [. . .]. [Además] su frente era espaciosísima, y su fisonomía, de esas que parecen revelar un entendimiento profundo y sintético." Notwithstanding this description, the author immediately allows another character to deflate the standard physiognomical interpretation just noted by opining that a great deal of money could be made by simply opening Don Basilio's head, extracting all the straw, and selling it. The narrator agrees, as he summarizes that in Don Basilio's case, that "Cráneo y entrecejo eran un timo frenopático" (296; vol.3, ch.1, sec.2).

While the deceptive physiognomy of Basilio Andrés de la Caña turns out to be humorous, at other times it can be deadly serious. In the case of Doña Perfecta, because of her "negros y razgados ojos, fina y delicada nariz, ancha y despejada frente, todo observador la

consideraba como acabado tipo de la humana figura" (495; ch.31). However, this is not really the case, for the eponymous protagonist is the personification of evil and the main villain of the novel. Therefore, Galdós goes to considerable lengths to supplement the above-mentioned, typical physiognomical semiotics by emphasizing Doña Perfecta's negative qualities: yellow complexion, bilious constitution, hardness of gaze, arbitrariness, and ability to manipulate others with appropriate words.

Another case of deceptive physiognomy that has very serious consequences concerns Víctor Cadalso in *Miau*. We have already noted that the description of Víctor reflects the ideas of Dr. Gall, which had become very popular among artists and sculptors by the time Galdós was writing (Colbert 1-38). Thus Galdós is *au courant* when he says concerning Víctor:

[E]l guapo mozo tenía nariz de contorno puro, ojos negros, de ancha pupila [. . .] . Lá frente, pálida, tenía el corte y el bruñido que en escultura sirve para expresar nobleza. Esta nobleza es el resultado del equilibrio de piezas craneanas y de perfecta armonía de línea. El cuello, robusto, el pelo algo desordenado y de azabache; la barba, oscura también y corta, completaban la hermosa lámina de aquel busto, más italiano que español. (579; ch.10)

It remains for Víctor's father-in-law, Ramón Villaamil, to set the record straight (and in darwinistic terms). He warns his daughter Abelarda concerning the novel's villain:

Ese hombre [. . .] es el más malo y traicionero que hay bajo la capa del sol. Para hacerle más temible, Dios, que ha hecho tan hermosos a algunos animales dañinos, le dió a éste el mirar dulce, el sonreír tierno y aquella parla con que engaña a los que no le conocen, para atontarlos, fascinarlos y comérselos después. (621; 24)

Occasionally the physical description coordinates exactly with the surname, although sometimes it does not. For example, concerning the "muy campechano" chaplain of the Micaelas convent, the narrator of *Fortunata y Jacinta* affirms, "Llamábase don León Pintado y en nada correspondía la persona al nombre" (595-96; vol.2,

ch.5, sec. 1). On the other hand, Galdós' mayor of Ficóbrica in *Gloria* is Juan Amarillo, "cuyo apellido es de los que más admirablemente se conforman con la persona." This character is an avaricious usurer, "[con] todo el rostro amarillísimo y reluciente" (584; vol.1, ch.38). Amarillo's wife, Teresa, "atacada de una ictericia crónica" (681; vol.2, ch.33), is just as greedy and equally as yellow. She has "amarillas manos," "dorada piel de la frente" and (in a complete departure from realist mimesis) a citrine countenance which glows more intensely whenever she comes in contact with persons of wealth (652; vol.2, ch.24).²² Let us note also the case of the already-mentioned villain of *La Fontana de Oro*, Elías Orejón, who demonstrates that Galdós, from the very beginning of his novelistic career, worked with surname-portraiture coordinations. To this *agent provocateur*, who can (as already noted) see in the night like a bird of prey, Galdós gives also special ears for hearing: "Hacían más singular el aspecto de esta cara dos enormes orejas extendidas, colgantes y transparentes. La amplitud de estos pabellones cartilagosos correspondía a la extrema delicadeza timpánica del individuo, la cual [...] parecía aumentar con la edad" (21; ch.2). The fact that extra-large ears in the nineteenth century could be considered a sign of criminality may also indicate what Galdós wished to communicate regarding Sr. Orejón.

Facial description, usually given very early in the presentation of a character, can, however, be postponed until a more effective moment. Such is the case of Doña Perfecta. Only after the reader has had the opportunity to see her in action for 30 chapters does the narrator confirm the opinion that has surely been formed by the reader. Not until the climax of the novel, shortly before Perfecta orders the murder of Pepe Rey, does the narrator guide the reader (as already noted) beyond some positive physiognomical signifiers to an explanation of how she can do this terrible deed (495; ch.31). Withholding facial description in order to give the true essence of a character only late in the novel did not, of course, originate with Galdós. For example, one remembers Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782), where only at the end of the novel—when the beautiful Madame de Merteuil's face has been made hideous by smallpox—does everyone agree that "son âme était sur la figure" (395).²³

Nevertheless, sometimes Galdós may give absolutely no facial description of a character. Such is the case of the reappearing doctor José Moreno Rubio. He initially appears in *La familia de León Roch* as the attending physician when a tracheotomy may be necessary to save the life of the child Monina Fúcar. Galdós presents the medical crisis in a melodramatic manner. As the doctor and the title protagonist discuss what to do, the narrator asserts, "Parecían dos

espectros secreteando al borde de sus tumbas." And then, when Moreno Rubio prepares his scalpel, "brillaba un acero, una herramienta lúgubre, más siniestra que el hacha del verdugo" (838; vol.2, ch.2). No facial description detracts from the mood that Galdós has created, even as the contradictory surnames—Moreno and Rubio—help to maintain the shadowy image of the physician. And always true to his original concept of the doctor, Galdós never does give any physical description of Moreno Rubio, although the latter reappears in a variety of settings as a minor character in six additional novels: *El doctor Centeno*, *Tormento*, *La de Bringas*, *Fortunata y Jacinta*, *Lo prohibido*, *Angel Guerra*.²⁴

Very importantly, Galdós' well-known and much-esteemed protagonist, the eponymous *Fortunata*, is also never afforded a portraiture. What little the reader learns in this respect comes from the perceptions of other characters, and from one instance of self-reflection as *Fortunata* sees herself in a mirror.²⁵ Certainly the author presents no controlling physical description, nor any hint of physiognomy to be interpreted or even "real-life" portraiture to be accepted. Thus the reader is left considerable freedom to imagine for himself or herself a very personal vision of the protagonist, based almost exclusively on four volumes of vicarious participation in the adventures of *Fortunata* herself.

Although only a limited number of characters appear in this study, portraiture based on observable quotidian reality, photographs, and portraits of historical personages, as well as other types of painting and sculpture is clearly a major fountain of characterization. Face value was so important that Galdós sometimes changed it completely as he worked from the preliminary manuscript to the final version. Very much aware of the pseudosciences of physiognomy and phrenology, Galdós utilized aspects of these systems; however, whenever necessary, he guided his reader beyond their standard conventions to his own desired interpretations of character traits.²⁶ Humor is also frequently a consideration, especially when Galdós playfully denigrates physiognomy and phrenology or when he shows how name and portraiture can supplement and reinforce each other. Nevertheless, although facial descriptions are always created with the reader in mind, as a part of the narrator-reader bonding in the implied contract of fiction, Galdós, quite evidently, chose at significant moments to avoid formal portraiture in order to achieve some other good, as in the case of *Fortunata* and Dr. Moreno Rubio. In the majority of cases, however, a rich variety of portrait techniques testifies that face value is a very important aspect of the creative art of nineteenth-century Spain's most important realist.

Notes

- ¹ It is a pleasure to thank Nancy Membrez, University of Texas (San Antonio), for calling to my attention Carlos María Cortezo (1850-1933).
- ² In *La desheredada* the term "la pecera" is used to designate the elder Pez's political district (1034; vol. 1, ch. 12, sec. 1); George Edberg believes that Galdós may be insinuating also that Spain itself is a gigantic fish bowl (416).
- ³ Some members of the family have "caras pisciformes," but the head of the family, Manuel José Ramón de Pez, does not. He, however, is given a pseudoscientific classification: "Orden de los *malacopterigios abdominales*. Familia, *barbus voracissimus*. Especie, *remora vastatrix*." (For a detailed analysis of these terms, see Edberg 416).
- ⁴ Villamil's interpretations of the apodo "Miau" (his "INRI") are "Mis Ideas Abarcan Universo," "Ministro I Administrador Universal," "Muerte Infamante Al Ungido," "Morimos Inmolados Al Ultraje," and "Muerte Infamante Al Universo."
- ⁵ Mauricia dies in a room beneath pictures of "asuntos que nada tienen de español: las batallas de Napoleón I, reproducidas de los de un tiempo célebres cuadros de Horacio Vernet y el barón Gros. ¿Quién no ha visto el *Napoleon en Eyleau*, y en *Jena*, el *Bonaparte en Arcola*, la *Apoteosis de Austerlitz* y la *Despedida de Fontainebleu*?" [. . .] [Mauricia] completaba la historia aquella expuesta en las paredes: era el *Napoleón en Santa Elena*" (174-75; vol. 3, ch. 6, sec. 1). While such a display of paintings concerning Napoleón would be unlikely in a Spanish domicile, Galdós may have known that it was common in France from Zola's novel *La Fortune des Rougon* (82).
- ⁶ Thiers was president of the First Republic and negotiated the peace treaty concluding the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71).
- ⁷ For more on Benina as a Christ figure, see among others, Chamberlin "Deleitar enseñando" 174-83.
- ⁸ Galdós presents Doña Lupe's countenance:

Sus ojos pardos conservaban la viveza de la juventud; pero tenía cierta adustez jurídica en la cara, acentuada de líneas y seca de color. Sobre el labio superior, fino y violado cual los bordes de una reciente herida, le corría un bozo tenue, muy tenue, como el de los chicos precoces, vello finísimo que no la afeaba ciertamente; por el contrario, era quizás la única pincelada feliz de aquel rostro semejante a las pinturas de la Edad Media, y hacía la gracia el tal bozo de ir a terminarse sobre el pico derecho de la boca con una verruguita muy mona, de la cual salían dos o tres pelos bermejos que a la luz brillaban retorcidos como hilillos de cobre. (531-32; vol. 2, ch. 3, sec. 3)

- ⁹ The full description of the cleric, named Anacleto/Aniceto in Alpha, is as follows:

Representaba éste como unos treinta y cinco años, y era más bien feo, con perfecto cara de cura. Apenas necesitaba afeitarse para tener la cara sin pelos, ojos claros, boca grande y fría, nariz gruesa, cuerpo enjuto, la mirada penetrante. Algo del aspecto del cura de provincia, apaletado. (f 542)

- ¹⁰ Galdós' narrator plays with the literal and figurative meaning of "carne":

La belleza femenina no le conmovía o le conmovía muy poco. [. . .] La carne que a él le tentaba era otra, la de ternera por ejemplo, y la de cerdo más, en buenas magras, chuletas riñonadas o solomillo bien puesto con guisantes. Más pronto se le iban los ojos detrás de un jamón que de una cadera, por succulenta que ésta fuese, y la mejor *falda* para él era la que da nombre al guisado. (564; vol.2, ch.4, sec.5).

For other aspects of the "carne" theme, which runs throughout *Fortunata y Jacinta*, see Chamberlin "A Further Consideration" (51-59).

- ¹¹ Galdós clearly does not want the reader to empathize with either Father Rubín or his ideas, for he also makes the priest smelly, belching, and dressed in dirty clothing.

- ¹² Balzac, for example, repeatedly mentions both Lavater and Gall—the former more than 100 times in his works (Rivers 105). Balzac even created a novelette in which the main plot line concerns the reading of physiognomies. In *La vieille fille* (*The Old Maid*), the eponymous character, Mademoiselle Cormon, a 40-year-old heiress, has an impelling need to marry. The desire for sexual satisfaction and procreation are the strongest and most important factors influencing her choice of a marriage partner. Balzac gives each of her three suitors a detailed physiognomy—which should allow the protagonist to choose easily the best husband for her needs. The tragedy is that she does not know how to read facial semiotics; she does not know how to make a correct analysis of character from the subtle signifiers provided. Consequently, she ends up with an impotent, vulgar, and politically incompatible husband—in this work which Galdós had in his library as part of Balzac's *Oeuvres complètes* (Berkowitz 178).

- ¹³ These engravings are acknowledged by Lavater to be reprints from the seventeenth-century painter Le Brun (1; vol.9 and passim).

- ¹⁴ For bird beak and nose similarities, see Lavater (152; vol.9); for these features in owl-like faces (128; vol.9).

- ¹⁵ See Chamberlin "Vamos a ver las fieras," "Social Darwinism," and "Animal Imagery and the Protagonist."

- ¹⁶ For Zola's use of animal-based physiognomy, see Gauthier (297-308). In 1910 Galdós remembered a time, "admirando mucho a Zola y

haciéndome sentir y pensar mucho sus novelas" (Shoemaker *La crítica* 88).

¹⁷ Lavater depicts human-cat and human-horse resemblances (126,130; vol.9), but in a serious manner, devoid of humor.

¹⁸ In a letter dated 6 April 1885, Galdós discussed the only two reservations he had concerning *La Regenta*: its length and its eroticism. Concerning the latter he wrote:

Bien se me alcanza que toda la vida humana, como la tierra sobre sus polos, gira sobre el pivote de la reproducción de la especie; pero así como en la vida no aparece éste sino en ciertas y determinadas ocasiones, porque la cultura lo disimula, y quiere aparentar otra cosa, el libro debe a mi juicio ofrecer una veladura semejante. Y crea Vd. que es mucho más efecto en el arte disimular el papel principalísimo que la fornicación hace en el mundo, que patentizarlo con tanta sinceridad. Hay en la obra de Vd. demasiada lascivia, y por esto [los] que no tendrán más remedio que confesar que les ha gustado, no lo hacen, gozosos de encontrar un terreno en que apoyarse. (qtd. Tintoré 311)

¹⁹ Two years later Pardo Bazán also uses bronze facial coloring and animality in the characterization of Primitivo Suárez in *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886). In delineating "el hombre de bronce" as the novel's villain, Doña Emilia emphasizes his "faz de bronce" (46; ch.5) and his "rostro, afeitado y enjuto [. . .] [con] una expresión de encubierta sagacidad y, de astucia salvaje, más propio de un piel rojo que de un europeo" (12; ch.1).

²⁰ Balzac had earlier utilized (in *La vieille fille*) the fact that a "nez prodigieux" is the Lavaterian sign of an active sexuality" (Rivers 126). For depictions of noses that indicate voluptuousness, see Lavater II, 169-70; vol.2.

²¹ Lavater has many faces of famous people, but, because of publication date, none of Cavour (1810-64).

²² For numerous other examples of facial jaundice, with negative connotations, consult Chamberlin, "Galdós' Use of Yellow" (158-63).

²³ I am indebted for this reference to Robert E. Anderson, Department of French and Italian, Univ. of Kansas.

²⁴ For details concerning Moreno Rubio's thirty-one years of fictional life, see Chamberlin, "Integridad" (1-16).

²⁵ William H. Shoemaker sums up the meager data: "a brunette with black hair and excellent teeth; black eyes and (as Fortunata judges herself while looking into a mirror) too large a mouth" (*The Novelistic Art* 269; vol.2).

²⁶ Galdós himself was similarly portrayed by Alas. Recalling his first meeting with Galdós in the Ateneo, Alas writes:

Vi ante mí un hombre alto, moreno, de fisonomía nada vulgar. Si por la tranquilidad que expresa su fisonomía poco dibujada puede creerse

que se tiene enfrente a un benemérito comandante de la Guardia civil, con su bigote ordenancista, en los ojos y en la frente se lee algo que no suele distinguir a la mayor parte de los individuos de las armas generales ni de las especiales. La frente de Galdós habla de genio y de pasiones, por lo menos imaginadas, tan vez contenidas; los ojos, algo plegados los párpados y tienen una singular expresión de ternura apasionada y reposada que se mezcla con un acento de malicia ... la cual, mirando mejor, que se ve que es inocente, malicia de artista. (Galdós 31)

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